DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 389 096 EA 027 345

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TITLE	Education: The Gateway to America's Future.
INSTITUTION	Department of Education, Washington, DC. Office of the Secretary.
PUB DATE	28 Feb 96
NOTE	13p.; Annual Address of the U.S. Secretary of Education on the State of American Education (3rd, St. Louis, MO, February 28, 1996).
AVAILABLE FROM	Internet address: http://www.ed.gov/Speeches/02-1996/speech.html
PUB TYPE	Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Access to Education; College Admission; Educational Innovation; *Educational Objectives; *Educational Quality; Excellence in Education; *Family School Relationship; Public Education; *Role of Education; School Choice; School Security; *Standards

ABSTRACT

This paper presents the contents of an address given by Richard W. Riley, United States Secretary of Education, on February 28, 1996, in St. Louis, Missouri, on the state of American education. Policymakers are divided on the future of public education; some want to cut or abolish it, others seek to rebuild and expand it. The paper describes current challenges to public education and outlines seven goals for improving it: (1) increase the national literacy rate; (2) support families so that they can help their children learn; (3) create safe, orderly, and disciplined schools; (4) set and achieve high standards; (5) promote educational innovation, including the use of technology and optional school choice; (6) prepare students for success in the work force; (7) sustain access to and find new ways to finance higher education; and (8) work together to find common ground to improve education. (LMI)

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Richard W. Riley
U.S. Secretary of Education
Third Annual State of American Education Address
St. Louis, Missouri
Wednesday, February 28, 1996

ED 389 096

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EDUCATION: THE GATEWAY TO AMERICA'S FUTURE

Thank you Caroline for your very warm introduction. I take great pleasure in coming here to Saint Louis -- the historic gateway to the American West -- to report to you on the state of American education. History tells us that the people of Missouri have always been strong for education. Catholic nuns opened the first school in Missouri in Saint Charles in 1818. The first public high school west of the Mississippi opened here in Saint Louis in 1853. I am delighted to be here again in the "Show Me" state, the heartland of America.

My special guest today -- Doctor Mary Jarvis, a native of this area and a graduate of Southern Illinois University -- exemplifies your strong commitment to education. "Doctor J," as her students call her, is recognized as the National Principal of the Year for her work helping at-risk young people stay in school. Now a principal in Denver, Colorado, Doctor Jarvis exemplifies what is best about American education.

I want to thank Dr. Ernie Perkins, principal of this wonderful school and Dr. Jerry Elliott, your very fine superintendent, and all the members of this community for your graciousness in allowing us to visit with you. I say that because we have guests from nine states in the audience and thousands of other Americans listening in at twenty-six down link sites across the nation.

I take great pride in recognizing the Missouri and Illinois winners of the prestigious Blue Ribbon Award for excellence in education who are with us today. And I am glad to see several recipients of Missouri's " Teacher of the Year" award here in the audience. These are the heroes of American education.

This is, I might add, the third time that Arline Kalishman, the principal of A.B. Green Middle School here in Maplewood, has been honored as a leader of a Blue Ribbon school. These educators are the best we have, and I would like to ask all of them to stand and be recognized -- as well as the four students who are with us today who received perfect scores on the ACT.

EA 027 345

THE ERA OF DUMBING DOWN IS OVER

I have come here to the heartland of America to talk about American education where it is happening; here at a typical American high school, where the future of America is being created each and every day -- to tell you that the era of "dumbing down" is over.

American education must reach for a new level of excellence, for the most basic of reasons: our very prosperity as a nation -- and the economic security of each and every American family -- depends on it.

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Today, in many ways, we face the same challenges that confronted the pioneers who left Saint Louis and headed West across the frontier. For we are crossing our own frontier defined by new knowledge, a new economic landscape, new ways of communicating.

We need to remember that the pioneers who crossed the Mississippi set out as a community, bound together with a common goal. They surely had their differences, but they came together for the common good. And that is a lesson we must heed as well in 1996.

For there is a growing debate in America about how we educate our children. On one side are those who believe we can prepare for the future by cutting education today, who see little value in public education, who seek -- quite literally -- to abolish it as an institution.

This view is, to my mind, too narrow, too divisive, too fond of bashing teachers, too quick to tear down rather than build up.

I disagree with that vision. The politics of blame and exploiting people's legitimate anxieties have never served America well, and it is so wrong when it comes to the education of our children.

On the other side of this debate are those who are willing to roll up their sleeves and invest in our children, who see the rebuilding and the expansion of public education as the very cornerstone of our nation's economic and democratic future, who believe that getting a diploma ought to mean something because you have worked hard to achieve it.

Yes, public education has its problems. We have to contend with violence, with too little accountability, and some schools are just beyond repair. But for every problem, I have found many more successful school communities that have come together and found common purpose in rolling up their sleeves to help their children learn. And that's the right way to go.

Sometimes, people can get so caught up listening to themselves debate that they live, die and get buried, and then the next crowd gets up and starts debating all over again and nothing gets done.

My fellow Americans, if ever there was a time in the history of this great nation when we needed to come together for the good of all of our children, it is now. We Americans have never been shy about rising to a challenge. Let us recognize what we have achieved in our lifetime. Millions of Americans have lived the American Dream and become the first in their families to get a college education. Women and minorities have gained strong footholds in higher education and the professions. Disabled Americans are no longer left in the darkness of ignorance, and we must make sure that never happens again. This is why I urge quick passage by the Congress of the very important IDEA legislation this year.

But we have much more to do. Our classrooms are filling up. Next year, we will enroll more young people in our schools than at any time in our nation's history -- 51.7 million -- breaking the record set in 1971 when the baby boomers came of age. So we have got to push hard. We are making progress in making our young people smarter but the pace is too slow to satisfy me. I say that for the most personal of reasons.

I am a grandfather. I have seven wonderful grandchildren. Anna, the youngest, was born last June. I have probably waved her photograph around to more people then she will ever imagine. So I want to make amends to my other grandchildren and show you their pictures too.

When I read a story to my grandchildren or call one of them up to congratulate them on their report card, I know why I get up in the morning and go to work just like millions of other parents and grandparents.

Our children and grandchildren represent who we are and what America will become.

President Clinton challenged us in his recent State of the Union address to move America forward. One of the centerpieces of his challenge was improving and investing in education. And our challenges are many.

We need to get America reading again and give parents the power to be more involved in their children's education. Our children need to be protected from drugs and violence, and every young person has to gain the technological literacy he or she needs for the coming times.

We need to challenge ourselves to strive for the excellence of high standards and teach our young people real-life skills to get good jobs. And we must make sure that the doors to a college education are open wide to every deserving student who has worked hard to make the grade.

BECOMING A NATION OF READERS

Our very first challenge is to get America reading again. That big model of a computer behind me symbolizes that the American people "smell the future." They recognize the need to get computers into the classroom as quickly as possible.

But you can't cruise or use the Internet if you do not know how to read. And that to my mind is our most urgent task -- teaching our children good reading habits -- getting America serious about reading.

Our national math and science scores are up because we have invested more than ten years of hard work in that effort. We are turning the corner. This is a great success story for American education, and it tells me that we know how to get results.

Our national reading scores, however, are flat and they have been flat for far too long. Now, America does reasonably well on international comparisons when it comes to literacy. But too many of our young people are groping through school without having mastered this most essential and basic skill.

The 1994 NAEP report tells us that 41 percent of all 4th graders, 31 percent of all 8th graders, and 25 percent of all 12th graders scored below the basic reading level. This is just not good enough.

A young person who cannot read is placed at an extraordinary disadvantage. And in far too many cases, these are the very young people who start down the road to truancy, giving up and eventually dropping out.

Let us recognize what we are all about here. Reading is much more than just a skill. It allows us to learn the wisdom of the ages, to see beauty in a line of poetry, even as we test the new ideas of our times. To read Jefferson is to be engaged with the very spirit of our democracy. To read the poetry of Maya Angelou is to capture the surging spirit of a rising and hopeful America.

And, in our new complex economic environment, 89 percent of the jobs that are now being created require much higher levels of literacy and math. To my way of thinking, improving America's literacy rate is just as important to this nation's future economic growth as balancing the budget.

This is why I am announcing today the beginning of a long-term effort to improve America's literacy. We are creating a national reading and writing partnership of more than thirty-five diverse groups dedicated to the single goal of improving reading and writing in America.

Working with the American Library Association, the Center for the Book at the Library of Congress, The National Retired Teachers Association, Hadassah, AMC theaters, Pizza Hut, the Girl Scouts of America, and the many members of our Family Partnership -- we want to encourage Americans to open a book and read.

This is a new partnership is going to put the spotlight on literacy. We are going to take our case to the American people and tell them that reading is where it all begins. We are going to lay out a strategy that gives parents "check points of progress" and encourages educators and state leaders to stay focused on helping our young people gain this most essential skill.

Now some people will surely put the blame for the lack of literacy on our schools. And some people will surely start up the debate about whether phonics are better than the whole language approach that some schools now use. I believe they are both appropriate and useful. It's not an either/or choice. But that debate, my friends, is not my purpose here today. Let's roll up our sleeves and rise to the challenge. We can all make a positive contribution.

I urge every family to follow the first rule of education and read to their children. Start early and keep at it. I encourage parents to find an extra thirty minutes in the day to help their children. If all parents in America made it their patriotic duty to find an extra thirty minutes to help their children learn more -- each and every day -- it would revolutionize American education.

All of our research tells us that this is so important. Read a book, read the sports page, read the comics or read R.L. Stine's "Goosebumps" and get excited together -- it doesn't matter. Just read.

Now, what else should parents do? Every child should have a library card. If your child doesn't have one -- and you should check today -- make sure he or she gets one this weekend.

I also encourage parents to set summer reading goals. Our research tells us that some children lose up to three to four months of newly acquired reading skills during the summer if those skills are not kept up between the school years.

I urge state leaders to put a new emphasis on reading. Every child should be well-established as a reader and be able to read independently by the end of the third grade. We should accept nothing less. Rudy Crew, the new Chancellor of Education in New York City, has it right with his new emphasis on reading -- and so does George Bush, Jr., the Governor of Texas.

I encourage local educators to use new assessments to make sure our young people read well, to give teachers and parents early and helpful feedback.

No young person should ever be put in the situation of accepting a high school diploma they cannot read or be unable to write a resume for the job she needs.

I ask community, civic and religious groups to work with our schools to open their classrooms at night to teach reading and writing, to give many immigrants -- young and old -- the gift of the English language. We will do our part to help you.

Millions of new immigrants want to be part of the American Dream. The issue isn't making English our national language; that's already a reality. The issue is finding enough teachers to teach all these immigrants who want to learn how to read and write English. Over the years, most immigrants pay back this country many times over for the opportunity to be good Americans.

THE CHALLENGE TO SUPPORT THE AMERICAN FAMILY

Getting America reading again is our first challenge. Our second challenge is to give parents the power to help their children learn. Strong families make strong schools. When parents get involved in their children's education, good things start to happen.

The Clay Elementary School and the Shepard Accelerated Academy here in the Saint Louis area are models of what can be done. In each case, getting parents involved, building ties to the community, and creating active links to the business community enabled these schools to earn the distinction of being named Missouri "Gold Star" schools this year.

We must link our schools to the community in new and different ways and give parents the support they need. Business is increasingly making that connection, helping schools retool for new times, and giving working parents time to help at their children's schools. The good work of Inter-Act Saint Louis, led by former Senator John Danforth, in getting churches to adopt public schools is another example of solid community support.

I urge parents to have a fierce commitment to the education of their children. Volunteer in school and stay connected to your children. Too often we live such busy lives that we disconnect from our children, and we don't even know it is happening. The time crunch can just about wear you down. But don't give up.

Slow down your lives. Talk to your children. Teach them the difference between right and wrong. Make your children proud to be Americans. Define your moral standards, and if that means turning off the television sometimes or using a "V" chip, then be strong and determined.

And here it is important to remind all Americans that our nation's public schools are not "religion-free" zones. Children do not have to leave their religious faith at the school house door. The First Amendment provides a broad mantle of religious freedom. At the same time it ensures every parent that school officials do not overstep their bounds and coerce students to violate their freedom of conscience.

I can report to you today that President Clinton's Guidelines on Religion have been well received. There has been a marked decline in the confusion and legal confrontation about the right of students to express their religious faith.

THE CHALLENGE TO MAKE OUR SCHOOLS SAFE

Our third great challenge is to keep our schools safe, orderly and disciplined. That is a basic rule. No teacher should ever fear to walk into a classroom. And no child should ever stay home from school because he or she is afraid.

Alternative schools need to be seen as options for the most troublesome students. We cannot let a few bad apples ruin the school day for the majority of our young people. We need to get these young people

out of the regular classroom but not give up on them. They need good, structured learning environments.

School districts need to keep a sharp eye on truancy as a first sign that young people are losing their way. Graduating from high school still remains a significant benchmark for keeping young people out of trouble and off welfare.

The President has gotten a great deal of mail lately from young people across the country regarding his comments in the State of the Union speech on uniforms. Last week, the President was in Long Beach, California and talked about it some more. His point about uniforms is well taken. If parents and teachers think uniforms can help their children learn, then uniforms ought to be seen as one positive way to instill discipline and prevent violence.

I now want to speak very directly to the parents of middle school children. For four years in a row, drug use has gone up among 8th graders. This is a nationwide trend. It disturbs me. Our research tells us that many young people simply do not believe that drugs are harmful, life-threatening or addictive. Parents need to help their children develop some strong inner fiber -- good character.

Nothing will be accomplished unless the young people of America live their lives by a new code of conduct, an honor code that isn't written on paper but written in their hearts, because growing up really comes down choices.

The choice not to cheat on a test or drive drunk; the courage to say no to peer pressure when it comes to drugs or smoking marijuana; the willingness of young men and women not to throw their lives away in a moment of passion, to wind up with a baby, and maybe even on the welfare line.

THE CHALLENGE TO ACHIEVE HIGH STANDARDS

Our fourth challenge is to recognize that we are smarter than we think.

We will never help our young people -- especially those living in poverty -- to measure up if we lower their expectations, water down their curriculum, and write them off by categorizing and stigmatizing them.

I believe in the young people of America. They have the same capacity to achieve as the generation that won World War II, as the generation that sent man to the Moon, as the generation that set out to save the environment and as the generation that created the pentium chip.

We set high standards for the food we eat, for the medicine in our bathroom cabinets, and for the music we listen to -- when the Saint Louis Symphony performs, we hear classical music at its very best. So why not reach for the best by giving all of our children a first class education?

To those who say America's effort to raise standards and increase accountability has lost its momentum -- I assure you, the standards movement is alive and well. We have had our peaks and valleys, but we are moving forward. I can report to you today that work is underway all across America to develop high standards in core academic subjects.

In Delaware, parents now know that in 12th grade science their children have to master an understanding of DNA. In Colorado, parents of 4th graders have a clear understanding of what is expected of their children when it comes to reading. And in northern Illinois twenty school districts are racing to be the

first in the world in science and math.

We are beginning to expect more of our children and we are starting to see the results. In Maryland, a steady trend in improving test scores tells us that high standards are making a difference. In Kentucky, 4th, 8th and 12th graders are demonstrating "dramatic improvement" on statewide tests.

Now, setting standards is not easy. The new national standards for math, science, civics, geography and the arts have been well received. They are useful "road maps" for local and state educators who are defining their own high standards. But the history standards were unacceptable to me, and the effort to set English standards has run into difficulties as well.

But when you run into difficulties, you don't quit. You go back at it and try again. This is exactly what Missouri did with the new "Show Me" standards. And that is exactly what is being done now as a new panel of historians redrafts the national history standards.

I want to be very clear in saying that there is no one way to establish standards. Every state is going to have to decide what works best for its students. Look at the various model standards that are out there and use what works best for you. But aim high.

President Clinton and I urge every community and state, each in its own way, to reach for new levels of excellence. We will continue to support the good work now being done in so many local communities through the Goals 2000 initiative.

Now, Goals 2000 attracts a lot of heat, and there are some people who have some very strange notions about what it is. So I want to tell you how it works. Every principal in this country has a desk drawer full of good ideas. Most teachers do too. Too often those good ideas never see the light of day because our schools are hard pressed just trying to make ends meet.

And that is where Goals 2000 makes the difference. Because Goals 2000 gives schools the extra money they never get to improve themselves. That is what it is. The energy to get better. Nothing more. I won't surrender this good idea to a few people who see ghosts under their bed every night -- who never roll up their sleeves and make a positive contribution for the sake of our children.

I urge those committed to high standards to keep this effort as mainstream and bipartisan as possible. And I look forward to the new energy that the nation's governors and business leaders will bring to the issue at next month's education summit.

But aiming high is only half the battle. Teachers need to be able to teach to high standards and we need a greater sense of accountability in public education. Missouri is setting a fine example in making sure that teachers have the preparation they need to teach to the new standards. Missouri's establishment of nine regional centers linked to Missouri colleges and universities is an example of forward thinking.

Let's remember that teaching is not a job but a demanding and exacting profession. I'm tired of those who make a living out of bashing teachers. We will only win the battle for excellence if we have excellent teachers.

If we give our teachers the support they deserve, then we must also ask our public schools to be much more accountable. Graduating from high school has to mean more than getting to go to the senior prom. Many creative efforts need to be looked at to make this happen: testing at 4th, 8th and 12th grade, statewide exit exams, school "report cards," parent-teacher compacts, new demanding standards for

certification and recertification of teachers and principals.

We need to find ways to keep the best teachers in the classroom, to weed out teachers who just can't cut it, and to have the good sense to counsel teachers to leave the profession when they have lost the excitement and zeal to teach.

I encourage teachers and their professional organizations to help make this happen. Public trust grows stronger when there is public accountability and public trust is good for all who have dedicated their lives to quality education.

THE CHALLENGE TO EFFECTIVELY INNOVATE

As we seek to aim high and increase public accountability, we need to press on in our effort to open up public education to new ways of doing business. That big computer behind me really is a symbol that we are in a new time, that the future is happening right now.

Technology is very much at the heart of our national effort to bring America's schools up to date. We are making good progress. One year ago, only 35 percent of all of America's public schools were hooked up to the Internet. Today, that figure stands at 50 percent. And we now have a new telecommunications law that gives schools the opportunity to be the first in line to get on line and at a lower cost.

We cannot miss this opportunity. We need to "fast forward' our efforts and make sure teachers are trained well. This is our national mission. It is as important as sending men to the Moon. If we persevere we will achieve President Clinton's goal of making sure that every library, school and classroom in this nation is wired and on-line by the year 2000.

Getting computers into America's classrooms has to be seen as just one step in our growing effort to move American education into the future. Public school choice, schools-within-schools, and the expansion of the charter school movement are three other winning examples of American creativity.

Public school choice needs to be seen as an option. Some of our most successful schools are small schools that create a community of learning. Young people shouldn't get lost in school and forgotten.

This is why President Clinton is a strong supporter of charter schools with public accountability. The President has asked the Congress in his new budget to create new "venture capital" to encourage the development of charter schools. I urge the Congress to respond with enthusiasm. I have visited charter schools, and I am particularly impressed by what charter schools are doing for disabled and under-achieving children.

Now, there are some who will tell you that private school vouchers are good for education as well. I believe they are dead wrong. Unlike charter school, private school vouchers offer us no public accountability. They are a retreat from the democratic purposes of public education, a way to divert public tax dollars, and they will wind up costing taxpayers a great deal of money.

I am keenly sensitive to the fact that many parochial school supporters see vouchers as one way to support the good work that they do. I recognize their day-to-day financial struggle. This is why I will encourage the United States Supreme Court to reconsider its ruling in Aguilar v. Felton, which continues to place an undue burden -- both financial and educational -- on many Catholic, Lutheran, Jewish and other religiously affiliated schools.

But, I am concerned that some private school voucher proponents have something else in mind when they talk about vouchers. I fear that they seek nothing less then the demise of public education. It dismays me that some think-tank intellectuals are leading this retreat from support of public education, and the democratic spirit that has always defined American public education at its best.

The American people are very clear about what they want. They want safe schools, the basics as a sure foundation, more demanding courses that meet high standards, computers into the classroom, good citizenship and classes that teach our young people real life skills and prepare them for college level work. They do not want private school vouchers.

THE CHALLENGE TO PREPARE YOUNG PEOPLE FOR WORK

And here, I think, is our sixth great challenge -- helping our young people to make something of themselves in these new economic times. Today, too many of our young people see no connection between what they learn in school and the skills they need to function in real life. And too many business leaders rightly complain that high school graduates come to them without the skills for today's jobs.

We need to redesign our schools for success, and place more attention on the forgotten middle -- the average kids with untapped potential who are still looking for direction. Today's young people will be tomorrow's paramedics, emergency room nurses, Army helicopter pilots, and the skilled technicians who build the NASA rockets.

Last week, Alan Greenspan, the Chairman of the Federal Reserve Board, told the Congress that our economy will only reap the "rewards of new technologies" when our schools do a better job of preparing our students and when we "ensure" that people on the job have the opportunity to keep on learning. He's got it right.

We know, for example, that by the year 2000 -- just four years from now -- 60 percent of all new jobs will require advanced skills. Yet, today, only 20 percent of our workforce possesses the skills needed to move ahead. Good paying jobs require more of an education, and that education has to start earlier and be more demanding. There is no point in preparing our young people for jobs in a widget factory.

This is why I am a strong believer in rethinking the American high school by creating partnership between high schools, business and community colleges that give many more of our young people career paths that fit the new economic times.

Apprenticeships, career academies, tech preps and other school-to-work opportunities represent concrete examples of how we can help young people prepare for good paying jobs. I urge young students to look at these new opportunities as real stepping-stones to go on to a local community college and future job security.

KEEPING THE DOORS TO COLLEGE WIDE

Keeping the doors to college wide open is our seventh great challenge.

Today, our nation's system of colleges and universities represents the brightest gemstone in America's

educational and economic crown. It is the envy of the world. For more than fifty years, we have made access to higher education part of the American Dream.

Yet today, the burden of paying for college is being placed more and more on students and their families. Students have taken on a larger share of the cost of their education. Four out of five students work today. And too many parents are trying to make ends meet while trying to save for their children's college education in the future.

In the last twenty years, forty million Americans have used a federal student loan to pay for their college education. That's the American middle class.

Today, two-thirds of all student financial aid dollars in this country come from my department. I am pleased to tell you that we have cut the student loan default rate in half, and we are collecting on many more defaulted loans, saving taxpayers millions of dollars.

Yet despite this good progress, we face difficulties reaffirming this national commitment to opening the doors to higher education even wider.

I remain perplexed, just about baffled, by the thinking of some in the Congress who want to cut student loans -- who don't seem to remember that they got their chance to go to college with the help of the American taxpayer. This is why we have spent the last year fighting to keep the new Congress from cutting $10 billion from our student loan program.

I also once again urge the Congress to preserve and expand our "direct lending program" which has the support of America's higher education community. This is no time to cave into the special interests, who don't like the competition and who are up in arms because their profit margin is dwindling. Students will always win with healthy competition, and that is the right way to help America's colleges and universities.

As we look to the future we need to create a new sense of shared responsibility in finding new ways to finance American higher education. This needs to be a broad effort working on many fronts.

Our elementary and secondary schools must do a much better job of preparing students for college level work. As standards go up, colleges will be able to shift resources away from remedial courses.

State leaders must look down the road. In nine out of the last ten years, state budgets have declined in their commitment to higher education. This year, I see new evidence that many Governors are already thinking ahead.

They are increasing funding for higher education and supporting creative financing mechanisms, including: the creation of pre-paid college tuition programs; education IRAs; and tax credits for full-time students. I support these creative new initiatives.

I urge our colleges and universities to use their ingenuity to hold the line on the cost of going to college. We are already pricing too many young people -- smart students, who are just poor -- out of an education. And we have too many middle class families already stretched to the limit.

For our part, I want to speak directly to every high school student in America today and make this promise. If you do your share, we will do ours. Every deserving student who works hard can get needed financial help to pay the tuition at a two- or four-year public college through a combination of loans, grants, and work study options. If you want to go to college, don't give up the dream because you don't

know where to turn for financial help.

We believe in rewarding excellence and hard work. This is why President Clinton has called for the creation of a new Presidential Honor's Scholarship of $1,000 for the top 5 percent of all graduating students in every high school in America.

We also believe that the maximum Pell Grant program should go up during each of the next five years to ultimately reach $3,120. And it makes good sense to me to rapidly expand our college work-study program to help millions of young people get ahead in life.

I encourage Congress to see the merit and enact into law President Clinton's tuition tax deduction, which would allow middle-class families to deduct up to $10,000 a year for college tuition and other costs. This is a sensible proposal that will make an immediate difference for thousands of American families.

To those who say we cannot afford to help this generation of young people -- I say look at our record of success and look down the road. We are on the brink of change -- at the gateway of a new time. This is absolutely the wrong time to cut our investment in education at all levels -- and the wrong time for Congress to be so out of touch with the American people.

THE CHALLENGE TO COME TOGETHER AS AMERICANS

The story of America in this century -- as I close now -- is the story of giving each new generation of Americans the opportunity to advance themselves through education. We are a people who believe in education, who know its value. And this I know for sure: We did not become the world's greatest superpower, the most productive nation in the world, on a foundation of ignorance.

As we cross this new frontier of knowledge, we need to recognize that the success and freedom of being an American -- in this day and age -- is the freedom of excellence -- the ability to be highly educated and highly trained -- to negotiate a complex economic environment to become productive and responsible citizens.

I urge every citizen in this great country to remember that we are raising our children not as Republicans, Democrats or Independents, but as Americans -- the future of our country. If we want to enlarge the civic life of this nation, let us re-invigorate our people's love of learning and put the "public" back into public education.

Improving education, caring for our children, keeping teenagers out of harm's way, and building our sense of community is a day-to-day civic task. What you put in, you get out -- that is the secret of success for American education. Just that.

Public education is one of the great essential building blocks of our democracy -- the public space where we teach our children good citizenship, and where we -- as adults -- often exercise our own citizenship by working with others for the good of our children.

E Pluribus Unum -- out of many, one -- doesn't come easy for America. But only America has done it well. Our task in these new times is not to retreat to our own separate racial, ethnic, cultural, or political interest group -- but rather to do the opposite -- to do the hard work of learning to come together for the good of all of our children.

Finding common ground is the urgent work of America in 1996.

If we are not quite the melting pot that we want to be, we are -- at the very least -- a rich American stew, full of many flavors. We all can contribute to what is good for America.

We know how to create good schools and now is the time to get the job done -- to roll up our sleeves -- and reclaim that pioneer spirit of working together to make America's schools bastions of hope, creativity and learning.

And I assure you of this -- as we come together, we will rekindle those civic virtues so essential to our democratic way of life, give our young people the skills they need for the coming times, and cross this new frontier of knowledge together. It is the right thing to do for our children and the right thing to do for America's future.

Thank you.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

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